NATIONAL CIVIL WAR NAVAL MUSEUM

January 2024

Port City Ram

A publication of the National Civil War Naval Museum at Port Columbus, Inc

Animals on Board

By Logan Barrett, Director of History & Collections

Officers of the USS *Miami* photographed with dogs.
U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph NH 60987

When one considers animals in the context of the Civil War, their immediate thought may likely turn to cavalry. The horses involved in equestrian charges and tactical actions were placed in just as much harm's way as their riders. Alternatively, one may think of the use of beasts of burden such as oxen and mules in transporting the vast quantities of supplies needed by the moving armies of the United States and Confederacy. However, other animals were also present during the war and filled a diverse range of roles. Recently, historians have turned their attention to the roles of animals and how their presence shaped the daily experiences of the Civil War era. While much of this scholarship has focused on animals in the armies, an examination of animals in the navies can inform new depictions of life at sea during the war.

Animals not designated for food rations were banned aboard ships in both the United States and Confederate navies. Yet, just like alcohol or gambling—which were likewise banned—animals were found on board most ships during the Civil War. These animals, called "mascots," frequently served the same function then as they do in present-day households: companionship

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From the Executive Director

As we "set our sails" for 2024, I want to thank our museum members and donors who are consistent in their support of this institution. We have been through a lot these past few years, including Covid and arson, but the institution has persevered! As a private non-profit, the NCWNM would not be here without your continued support. Again, thank you.

We have a busy spring schedule planned that rolls right into summer (yes, it will be here before we know it). Please join us for the *Women's' Month Victorian Tea, Black History Month Program* and of course, *RiverBlast* in April. Moving forward we'll offer our annual *Mother's Day Tea, Cool History* Summer Programs and the *Speakers Series*, culminating in early fall with a brand new fundraiser.

The most exciting project this year is the completion of our newest permanent exhibit, ***Columbus: A Civil War City***. Located in the *Jackson* Gallery, it will tell the story of Columbus from its early days through the Civil War, with focus on its industrial past, Horace King the bridgebuilder, the last land battle, and of course, the *Jackson*. We have completed the research and design portions of the exhibit, and would welcome your financial support for the fabrication and installation portions.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to introduce Gabrielle (Gabby) Tucker, our new Director of Guest Services. Gabby is the first person you'll meet upon entering the museum, She is responsible for the admission desk, the museum store, and a lot of other projects. As our third full-time employee, she is an invaluable part of the museum team. Gabby has a B.A. in History and previously worked at Westville. She, and Jamyah Dorman on the weekends, represent the museum to the public.

This museum is a national institution with a local story. It is your museum, no matter where you live. We'd love to hear from you, and see you when we can. Once again, thank you for your support and your patronage.

Holly B. Wait

Ladies Victorian Tea

In honor of Women's History Month
March 2, 2024, 1:00 pm

Your fee of **$30** includes our gift of a cup & saucer, yummy petit fours, scones, etc., and discussion on 19th & early 20th century women's suffrage.

Visit portcolumbus.org or call 706-327-9798 to register.

WHEN: **April 6 & 7, 2024**

WHAT: A chance to step back in time and experience the Civil War era through the eyes of sailors, marines, soldiers and civilians.

FREE to the public!

Military reenactors, sutlers, and tradesmen from across the Southeast will bivouac on the museum's grounds throughout the weekend, ready to educate and entertain. The event also includes in-depth museum tours and special programs, an amazing Kids Craft & Game Area, artisan crafters, food trucks, musical entertainment, and multiple cannon firings!

Reenactors, crafters, food vendors wanted. Please call 706-221-1074 for information.

SPONSORED BY:

National Civil War NAVAL MUSEUM

RIVER BLAST

African Americans in the Civil War Navies

Join us as we commemorate **Black History Month** with a day of special guided tours. Help us mark the occasion with ***African Americans in the Civil War Navies***, an insightful and immersive walk-through of Port Columbus complete with living history interpretation. Those interested in participating in this unique and enriching experience will have three opportunities to do so on February 10th. This tour offers patrons a variety of stories, highlighting the Navy experience through the eyes of unsung heroes during this difficult time in history. Tickets will be available at the door. For group ticket sales (10 or more) and additional information, please call 706-327-9798.

When: **Saturday, February 10th at 11:00 AM, 1:00 PM, & 3:00 PM.**
Cost: **General Admission** ~ Adults $9 (+ tax), Seniors & Military $8 (+ tax), Students $7 (+ tax) Children 6 and under free
Where: **National Civil War Naval Museum**

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Animals on Board

that may have reminded sailors of pets at home. Animals in this role could stave off loneliness for sailors away from family or soothe sorrow associated with the experiences of war. In this way, these mascots allow us to draw connections between how animals impacted human emotions in the nineteenth century and people's relationship with pets today.

These mascots fulfilled other purposes beyond companionship. For instance, some crews used their dogs during shore leave on hunting expeditions. These dogs facilitated a social activity that both entertained sailors as well as supported a shared boost of morale among a ship's crew. Cats served a practical purpose as the primary rodent-hunters on ships. These cats controlled the populations of rats and mice on board, thus playing an important role in limiting the spread of disease. Furthermore, cats have long been considered lucky in the superstitions of maritime folkways. In many maritime cultures, the presence of a cat on board historically promised safe travel as well as the lack of disease outbreaks. Therefore, cats fostered positive outlooks among crews.

While the most common, cats and dogs alone were not the full range of animals used as mascots. For instance, the USS *Fernandina* became known for its collection of animals, including an owl with clipped wings and at least two racoons. The USS *Wabash* and the USS *Tyler* both carried a black bear aboard. The bear was removed from the *Wabash* following an attack on the ship's quartermaster which cost the man his leg. Other more exotic mascot choices included eagles, snakes, and an alligator. These mascots served as both a source of entertainment as well as a perhaps underappreciated source of pride for a crew. The fact that these mascots were frequently present in the crew photographs further suggests their significance to the ship.

One more animal has long been associated with the United States Navy—goats. During the Civil War, sailors often ate much better than their counterparts on land. This was in part due to the surprising amount of access to livestock, dairy, and fresh produce on board the vessels. No animal became a more common food source for the Navy than goats which provided both milk and meat. Much more than cows, sheep, or even chickens, goats thrived on board ships in the worst conditions because of both their balance and resistance to illnesses associated with maritime life. Although now a mascot rather than a typical food source, the goat remains an important symbol for the U.S. Navy to this day.

At the National Civil War Naval Museum, our staff is focused on telling the stories of life in the navies including the interactions between the sailors themselves. However, to gain a more complete picture of life at sea, it is important to remember that humans were not the only life on board naval vessels during the Civil War.

The crew of the USS *Hunchback* with a sailor holding a dog.

Collections Corner

This Civil War era naval time fuse was recently given to the museum by a donor who discovered it and other similar artifacts as she was cleaning out her father's house after his passing. He had been part of the crew that raised the CSS *Jackson* and *Chattahoochee* during the early 1960s.

Here's how it worked. The fuse screwed into a cannon shell filled with black powder. The flame from the cannon firing would ignite the fuse. The fuse element would burn, and after a predetermined delay, ignite the powder and the shell would explode. This brass fuse is marked ORD for ordnance with an anchor symbol signifying naval artillery. The year 1862 is stamped on the rim. A lead cap was used to seal the fuse from the elements. This would be removed prior to firing, allowing the flame to ignite the fuse element. This disc is marked 10 SEC noting a 10-second delay.

Here's what we did. When we received this artifact, it needed a thorough cleaning. It was heavily corroded, and the markings were not visible. Since this was potentially an explosive device, safety was a top priority. The fuse was submerged in water. Soft bristle brushes, plastic and wood picks were then used to clean the fuse. Remnants of the internals were carefully removed to make the fuse inert. A mild vinegar solution also effectively cleaned away grime and corrosion. Special care had to be taken during the process, so as not to damage the artifact. After two days of work the artifact was added to our artillery fuse and tool exhibit.

The Battle of Lucas Bend

By Ian Poole,
Former Intern & "Agent" Afloat in Alaska

The infamous contest between the Confederate Ironclad *Merrimac* (*Virginia*) and the USS *Monitor* is often used to mark the conclusion of the age of wooden warships and the prevalence of iron ones. While the events which transpired at Hampton Roads in March of 1862 certainly provided a dramatic scene with which to pin such a claim, previous naval engagements had occurred earlier in the war which convinced the naval commands of both sides that the ironclad was the future of maritime warfare. The *Monitor*, commissioned on February 25, 1862, was the first ship designed and built as an ironclad, but the US Navy had begun the process of converting its existing timberlands (vessels whose primary protection was layers of wooden armor) into ironclads in late 1861. The retrofitted ships proved themselves well against strong rebel defenses along the Mississippi, Cumberland, and Tennessee rivers. These newly upgraded ships were being tested and proving their superiority before either the *Monitor* and *Virginia* were completed.

In the Autumn of 1861, Confederate General Leonidas Polk invaded neutral Kentucky and occupied the trade hub of Columbus on the Mississippi with a large army of 21,000 men. As soon as Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant assumed command of Union troops in the Cairo Department with around 10,000 men, he attempted operations to remove Polk and open the river gateways to the South. An inconclusive fight

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Battle of Lucas Bend

around Belmont, Missouri on November 7th convinced Polk that he was under siege from a much larger army. Polk's ensuing defensive tactics gave Grant time to consolidate his forces and plan his assaults on the forts guarding the entrances to Alabama and Mississippi. A significant part of the preparation of this operation would be centered around hampering rebel communications and preventing reinforcements and supplies moving to and from Columbus. These river based objectives had prompted the Confederates to form a flotilla of timberclads and cottonclads, and the Union responded in kind by forming a small fleet of timberclads.

These Union timberclads, the *Lexington, Essex*, and the *Tyler* along with the wooden gunboat *Conestoga*, performed escort duty for troop transports and harassed rebel smugglers under the command of Flag Officer Andrew Foote. The *Lexington* and *Tyler* escorted Grant's army at Belmont, past dueling rebel artillery batteries and eventually covered the army's retreat. While they performed well, they could not sustain themselves in a protracted fight with well-placed shore batteries. Only a month later, the *Essex* would see its wooden armor replaced by iron plates, making it the squadron's first ironclad.

Although 1862 began with the Confederate army still stuck in Columbus due to fears of a renewed Union attack, Foote needed to ensure that they did not attempt to break out and disrupt Grant's new target: Fort Henry on the Tennessee River. To complete this task, Foote used his squadron to conduct demonstrations around Columbus and increased the length and number of patrols, hoping to catch rebel smugglers and disrupt communications. These demonstrations also included expeditions in force down the river to not only test the strength and position of the Confederate guns, but to locate underwater obstacles and mines. It was equally important to make the rebels believe another major attack was underway. Therefore, the ironclad *St. Louis* was added to the fleet, and troops were assembled in Cairo with all the preparations being made for an apparent attack on Columbus. Having learned of these movements, Confederate Naval Cdr. George Hollins moved his small gunboat and timberclad fleet, consisting of the *Ivy*, *Jackson*, *General Polk*, and floating battery *New Orleans*, out of Columbus to investigate.

On January 12, 1862, the *Lexington* and the *St. Louis* received reports of this movement while preparing to transport troops. In heavy fog they traveled downriver and engaged in a brisk exchange of fire with the rebel vessels. Grant sent the *Tyler* to assist, but it was held back as the two ironclads were more than capable of dealing with the fast but weakly armed and armored Confederate ships. Hollins' ships were faster than the ironclads, and he attempted to draw them towards the protective heavy shore batteries around Columbus, but the ironclads had strict orders not to engage those guns under any circumstance. Thus the battle ended with the Union vessels returning to Cairo and the Confederates to Columbus. Although a constant stream of fire was maintained, there were no men or material losses for either side.

The skirmish had little immediate value, but marked an important turning point in strategy for both the Union and the Confederacy. Never again would the Union employ timberlands for the role of leading engagements, opting to relegate them to transport escort and patrolling duties. For the Confederates, the lesson was much more sobering. The seeming invincibility of the ironclads had no match, and it would not be until Virginia's rampage of the Union fleet at Newport News two months after the Battle of Lucas Bend that the Confederates had an answer. The success and sustainability of the ironclads in combat produced a fundamental shift in naval doctrine. While the Battle of Hampton Roads certainly brought this shift to the attention of the general public, it was the much smaller Battle of Lucas Bend which convinced the US Navy that warship production should shift to retrofitting timberlands as well as building new ironclads. The Confederate Navy also learned lessons from Lucas Bend. Thus began an ironclad fever in the South which resulted in the construction of over 20 ironclads, mostly designed to defend the river systems which Hollins' wooden fleet was incapable of doing on the Mississippi.

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. . . from October 1 through December 31, 2023

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